

The School Breakfast Program

1. What is the School Breakfast Program?

The School Breakfast Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It began as a pilot project in 1966, and was made permanent in 1975.

The School Breakfast Program is administered at the Federal level by the Food and Nutrition Service. At the State level, the program is usually administered by State education agencies, which operate the program through agreements with local school food authorities in nearly 83,000 schools and institutions.

2. How does the School Breakfast Program work?

The School Breakfast Program operates in the same manner as the National School Lunch Program. Generally, public or nonprofit private schools of high school grade or under and public or nonprofit private residential child care institutions may participate in the School Breakfast Program. School districts and independent schools that choose to take part in the breakfast program receive cash subsidies from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for each meal they serve. In return, they must serve breakfasts that meet Federal requirements, and they must offer free or reduced price breakfasts to eligible children.

3. What are the nutritional requirements for school breakfasts?

School breakfasts must meet the applicable recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans which recommend that no more than 30 percent of an individual's calories come from fat, and less than 10 percent from saturated fat. In addition, breakfasts must provide one-fourth of the Recommended Dietary Allowance for protein, calcium, iron, Vitamin A, Vitamin C and calories. The decisions about what specific food to serve and how they are prepared are made by local school food authorities.

4. How do children qualify for free and reduced price breakfasts?

Any child at a participating school may purchase a meal through the School Breakfast Program. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the Federal poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals. (For the period July 1, 2006, through June 30, 2007, 130 percent of the poverty level is \$26,000 for a family of four; 185 percent is \$37,000.) Children from families over 185 percent of poverty pay full price, though their meals are still subsidized to some extent.

5. How much reimbursement do schools get?

Most of the support USDA provides to schools in the School Breakfast Program comes in the form of a cash reimbursement for each breakfast served. The current (July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007) basic cash reimbursement rates are:

Free breakfasts	\$1.31
Reduced-price breakfasts	\$1.01
Paid breakfasts	\$0.24

Schools may qualify for higher "severe need" reimbursements if a specified percentage of their lunches are served free or at a reduced price. Severe need payments are up to 24 cents higher than the normal reimbursements for free and reduced-price breakfasts. About 65 percent of the breakfasts served in the School Breakfast Program receive severe need payments.

Higher reimbursement rates are in effect for Alaska and Hawaii.

Schools may charge no more than 30 cents for a reduced-price breakfast. Schools set their own prices for breakfasts served to students who pay the full meal price (paid), though they must operate their meal services as non-profit programs.

6. What other support do schools get from USDA?

Through Team Nutrition, USDA provides schools with technical training and assistance to help school food service staffs prepare healthy meals, and with nutrition education to help children understand the link between diet and health.

7. How many children have been served over the years?

In Fiscal Year 2004, over 8.9 million children participated every day. That number grew to 9.3 million in Fiscal Year 2005. Of those, 7.6 million received their meals free or at a reduced-price.

Participation has slowly but steadily grown over the years: 1970: 0.5 million children; 1975: 1.8 million children; 1980: 3.6 million children; 1985: 3.4 million children; 1990: 4.0 million children; 1995: 6.3 million children; 2000: 7.5 million children.

8. How much does the program cost?

For Fiscal Year 2005, the School Breakfast Program cost \$1.92 billion, up from \$1.77 billion in Fiscal Year 2004.

The cost in previous years: 1970: cost of \$ 10.8 million; 1975: cost of \$ 86.1 million; 1980: cost of \$287.8 million; 1985: cost of \$379.3 million; 1990: cost of \$ 599.1 million; 1995: cost of \$1.04 billion; 2000: cost of \$1.39 billion.

For more information:

For information on the operation of the School Breakfast Program and all the Child Nutrition Programs, contact the State agency in your state that is responsible for the administration of the programs. A listing of all our State agencies may be found on our web site at www.fns.usda.gov/cnd, select “Contact Us”, then select “Child Nutrition – School Meal Programs”.

You may also contact us through the office of USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, Public Information Staff at 703-305-2286, or by mail at 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 914, Alexandria, Virginia 22302.

September 2006